

**Thursday, October 26, 2006**

On Saturday, just before speaking at a celebration for Bishop Darrin Allan of the Salvation and Deliverance Church in Wyandanch, before an interview in Woodbury with News12 about the National Guard, before hosting my annual military academy fair in Islip, I had real work to do.

Heavy winds had left a thick blanket of dried pine needles across my lawn and driveway. So I put on some jeans, a sweatshirt and my favorite West Point baseball cap; grabbed my essential supplies, (one IPOD, one thermos of coffee, one rake, one shovel, one pile of leaf bags, and my dog Max) and went to work.

A few minutes later, my letter carrier drove up in his van. "Congressman!" he exclaimed, "What are you doing?"

"Raking," I said, as I leaned on my rake.

"You're not cut out for this kind of work!" He laughed.

We spoke for a few moments. "What kind of fuel do you use for the mail-truck?" I asked.

"Gas," he reported. "We used to have natural gas but it didn't work out."

Which gave me an idea (more on that another time).

My mailman gave my idea his stamp of approval. Then he handed me my mail, and drove off with a supportive "Don't work too hard."

I resumed my raking until my next door neighbor and her children appeared. We waved and exchanged neighborly hellos over the yelping of my dog.

Back to the raking, the shoveling, the bending. Until my neighbor across the street ventured out with a concerned look. "Steve! Ya wanna borrow my leaf-blower?"

"Nah. I like the exercise," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. And I put mine behind a broom.

My cell phone rang. My daughter was reporting on the PSAT she had just taken and advising me of my driving responsibilities for later in the day. (You can be a Congressman, a CEO, or a NASA astronaut. But for as long as you have a teenager, you're nothing more than a chauffeur).

Before I knew it, and with only half my job finished, it was time to get back to my other job: a Representative. A shirt and tie replaced the sweatshirt. Shiny brown loafers replaced my paint-splattered-mud-encased-tattered-weekend-work-shoes.

It was a perfect Saturday: Raking pine needles up; coming up with a clean-energy idea to raise with the Post Office; speaking to my letter carrier and my neighbors; to News12 reporters and the members of a local church; and meeting young men and women who are interested in a congressional nomination to our military academies.

Perfect until someone told me about a CNN report that ran during the day. It was about the "Do-Nothing Congress."

Posted by: SI